

## **Regional Session I: Australasia and North America**

Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, 13 October 2015

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### **SESSION REPORT**

#### ***General Fire Assessment***

Fire and land management is being increasingly challenged around the world by a changing wildland fire environment. The reasons for this include increasing wildland fuel loads under previous fire exclusion policy, expanding wildland-urban interface, increasing human-caused fires as population increases with greater access to wilderness areas, and climate change-altered fire regimes that are characterized by longer fire seasons, higher fire intensities, greater severity of fire impacts, and increased lightning fires. Additionally, all of this is occurring at a time period of rapidly increasing fire management costs, and aging equipment and infrastructure.

The international fire community recognizes that a key fire management strategy to addressing the increased difficulty in managing fire is by enhancing international cooperation. This theme was emphasized throughout the regional session with presentations focused on sharing international firefighting resources through bilateral agreements, on continued cooperation of the international symposiums and by discussing new initiatives like the International Fire Strategy in North America.

#### ***Proposals***

In 2012, the Forest Fire Management Group (FFMG) of Australia and New Zealand participated in a study tour of North American fire management and research agencies. More recently, the North American Forest Commission-Fire Management Working Group (NAFC-FMWG) participated in a study tour of Australia and New Zealand. On May 1-2, 2014 an International Symposium on Bushfire Management was held in Canberra, Australia to facilitate participation by the study tour members. The FFMG convened the symposium bringing together senior bushfire managers and researchers from the USA, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand and Australia. The symposium focused on the current state of knowledge, both scientifically and operationally, the identification of emerging issues in bushfire management, as well as ensuring the development of bushfire management networks on a global basis, and to identify areas for improvement and collaborative research and development interests.

The North America study tour group recommended such symposiums continue in a similar format in the future. They offer opportunities to focus efforts globally as practitioners from the participating agencies work together to lead our wildland fire community into the future. Increased engagement between operational fire experts and scientists globally would benefit all parties concerned.

Due to the similarity in wildland fire problems and evolving fire management programs within the Americas, the relative proximity of American countries in a global context, and fire season differences between northern and southern hemispheres, there is a collective advantage to sharing fire knowledge, expertise, information/intelligence, and resources between countries and regions within the American continents. The NAFC-FMWG has recently developed a draft International Fire Strategy to promote increased international fire management cooperation and technology transfer in the Americas and globally. The objective is to support enhanced international cooperation in training, information and resource-sharing, and science and technology; and to build high-level support by senior decision-makers through fire management strategy and policy development to maintain long-term program continuity.

Increased international collaboration within North America continues to be the priority of the NAFC-FMWG, as well as increased international cooperation within the Americas and globally. Both of these priorities will be supported through development of the new NAFC-FMWG International Fire Strategy, resulting in greater collaboration in training, science and technology exchange, and information and resource-sharing.

### ***Recommendations***

1. It is recommended that fires be managed from the perspective of responsible land management rather than simply from the perspective of an unforeseeable natural disaster.
2. It is recommended that the FFMG and the NAFC-FMWG continue its close cooperation and communication through study tours and participation at annual meetings.
3. It is recommended to continue the expansion and coordination of international training, and exchange of fire management expertise, and science and technology.
4. It is recommended Australasia and North America maintains their current international bilateral agreements and pursue opportunities to increase bilateral agreements with additional nations.
5. It is recommended the NAFC-FMWG sponsor a 2nd International Symposium during the 2016 Australia/New Zealand study tour of North America.
6. It is recommended to continue development of the NAFC-FMWG International Fire Strategy.